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Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Vol de nuit. Édition critique par Monique Gosselin- Noat

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ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY, *Vol de nuit*. Édition critique par MONIQUE GOSSELIN-NOAT. (Textes littéraires français, 643.) Genève: Droz, 2017. xcviii + 290 pp., ill.

In his preface to *Vol de nuit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), André Gide observes that ‘tout ce que Saint-Exupéry raconte, il en parle “en connaissance de cause”’ (p. 12). The author’s second novel, based on his own experiences as an airmail pilot in Buenos Aires – ‘le goût de piloter l’habite’ (pp. xii-xiii) – recounts the trials and tribulations of Fabien, whose storm-tossed aircraft loses all radio contact with station chief Rivière on the ground. Written in a lyrical style with its ‘silences contemplatifs ou angoissés [...] qui lui donnent une couleur de poème en prose’ (pp. liv-lv), the twenty-three brief chapters comprising the work are a poetic tour de force, revealing an author in his creative ascendancy and already anticipating the imaginative splendour of *Le Petit Prince* (1943). Translated into multiple languages and adapted for the cinema screen in 1933 (*Night Flight*, dir. by Clarence Brown), *Vol de nuit* is, today, an internationally renowned work. In this critical edition, Monique Gosselin-Noat steers a scholarly course through Saint-Exupéry’s project, providing an expert account of the novel’s chronology and autobiographical echoes. An Introduction describes in detail the genesis of the novel between October 1929 and May 1931 and offers some invaluable insights into Saint-Exupéry’s careful writing strategy (‘il se corrige avec beaucoup de minutie’, we learn (p. lviii). Interestingly, the novel as we now have it was not written in chronological order; rather, it was crafted across various geographical locations, including Toulouse and Barcelona, over a period of more than one and a half years. Fittingly, Gosselin-Noat records how ‘il écrit à raison de deux à trois pages, parfois quatre, plus rarement cinq par jour ou plutôt par nuit, car c’est la nuit qu’il rédige’ (p. xix). Equally illuminating are the references to Saint-Exupéry’s personal correspondence where, despite the effort required in the writing process, his pride in his work is apparent: as he writes to his mother in 1930, ‘j’écris peu, je n’ai pas le temps, mais le livre que je forme si lentement serait un beau livre’ (p. xix). The annotated comments on the text amount to a fascinating narrative in their own right: explanatory footnotes on

the author's references and chronological clarifications on the project's completion provide the reader with a comprehensive account of both the form and substance of Saint-Exupéry's work. In addition, the 'Variantes et Notes sur le manuscrit' highlight the evolutionary changes in each chapter as the writing progresses, something that the specialist reader will find invaluable. The volume also contains some fine photographs of the author's aviation adventures and facsimiles of pages from the manuscript to *Vol de nuit*, complete with Saint-Exupéry's inimitable drawings. Erudite and rigorous in its organization, this critical edition will provide many rich seams for specialists while also appealing to non-specialists in its fascinating exposition of a creative genius.

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